

NEWS RELEASE

**January 8, 2004
For Immediate Release**

**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

**Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service**

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Public Forum to Focus on the Conservation Security Program

Bismarck, ND ----- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will be holding a public forum on Thursday, January 22, 2004, to provide farmers, ranchers, and other USDA program participants with an opportunity to comment on all facets of the new Conservation Security Program (CSP). Publication of the proposed rule for CSP on January 2, 2004, marks the start of the 60-day public comment period.

Upon release of the proposed rule, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman stated, "The Conservation Security Program will reward the best and motivate the rest by identifying Those agricultural producers who historically have been the best stewards of their land while providing incentives for those who want to increase conservation practices. The results will be improved soil and water quality, reduced soil erosion, and enhanced critical wildlife habitat."

Authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, the fundamental intent of CSP is to complement existing conservation programs by supporting ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural working lands and enhancing the condition of America's natural resources. It is designed to reward the best conservation stewards of the most environmentally sensitive areas in targeted watersheds.

The forum will begin at 1 p.m. in the North Dakota Game and Fish Auditorium, 100 North Expressway, Bismarck. The meeting is expected to end by 3 p.m. Five-minute oral testimony and/or written testimony will be accepted at the meeting.

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The primary objective of this forum will be to solicit input from producers on key issues regarding implementation of CSP. The proposed rule, as well as additional information on CSP and other conservation programs is available on the NRCS web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/products.html>.

Those unable to attend on January 22 can submit comments to david.mckay@usda.gov or mail their comments to Conservation Security Program Comments, ATTN: David McKay, NRCS Conservation Operation Division, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013 or Tom Coleman, NRCS, P.O. Box 1458, Bismarck, ND 58502-1458.

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